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Inaugural Dissertation
on
The Digestive Organs;

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The Digestive Organs.

It is, I believe, acknowledged by every one, that the Diges=tive Organs are of more importance, and hold greater ascen=dency over the animal æconomy than any others—and when a morbid change takes place in their functions or structure, the whole machine is liable to become disor=dered.

How carefully and seduously then should we attend to them, and strictly observe and correct the least devia=tion from a healthy action.

Fully impressed with the importance of taking these organs into view, I beg leave to make a few re=marks on the advantages derived from keeping them steadily before us, and of enumerating some of the con=sequences which arise from neglecting this impor=tant object. By paying strict attention to them, many of the most obstinate diseases are overcome, which resisted every other means, and many un=pleasant complaints are obviated.

It would be of great moment indeed, if the me=dical world at large would adopt the language

of Dr. Chapman, and say, when they are called upon to treat a disease:- "What connection has this complaint with the Digestive Organs?"

In private life we frequently see that attention which is due to the daily evacuation of the bowells, and which cleanliness as well as health requires, entirely neglected. This is particularly applicable to females, who, sometimes under a notion of false delicacy, at others for want of opportunity, and from neglect, &c. refuse the calls of Nature, which, when persisted in for some time, induces a torpid and inactive state of the bowells, and the desire to go to stool is completely removed. This being accompanied with irregularities and impropriettes in diet, which is a necessary consequence in the polite world, a train of evils follow:- The appetite is impaired - indigestion, with its concomitant symptoms, as languor, listlessness, debility, head-ache, severe pains in the balls of the eyes, and many intractable complaints arise.

Thus we see what mischievous consequences ensue from what is generally supposed a trivial incident. Whom are we to blame for all this? Surely parents, from whom we receive our first notions of what are right and wrong, have a great hand in this growing evil.

If mothers, who have the guidance of our infantile days, would instil into the minds of their children the propriety, nay, the absolute necessity of visiting daily the Temple of Hoacina, and of observing a rigid adherence to diet, (particularly in those of a delicate habit,) we should soon have the pleasure of seeing our rising generation spring up to maturity with that robust vigour and rosy health, which is becoming a good and wise nation.

To enumerate all the diseases which are either kept up or induced by a disordered state of these organs, would be a tedious and difficult task. Indeed, there is hardly one which is not aggravated by this cause.

It is admitted by all, that disorders of the chylo=
poietic Viscera will affect the whole system, but
the effects of these disorders have not received that at=
tention which they demand.
"They may produce in the nervous system", says Mr.
Abernethy, "a diminution of the functions of the
brain, even so as to occasion Apoplexy and Hema=
plegia, or a state of excitation causing delirium,
partial nervous inactivity and insensibility, or
the opposite state of irritation and pain. They
may produce in the muscular system weak=
nefs, tremors and palsy, or the contrary affections
of spasm and convulsions. They may excite fever,
by disturbing the actions of the sanguiferous sys=
tem, and cause various local diseases by the ner=
vous irritation which they produce, and by the
weaknefs which is consequent on nervous dis=
order, or imperfect chylification. Or if local dis=
eases occur in a constitution deranged in the
manner which I have described, they will be=

come peculiar in their nature and progress, and difficult of cure. Affections of all those parts which have a continuity of surface with the stomach, as the throat, mouth, lips, skin, eyes, nose, and ears, may be caused or aggravated by these complaints."

In consequence of the very intimate connection between the brain and the Digestive Organs, a disordered state of the one mutually increases that of the other. There may be great disturbance of the nervous functions of the brain, without producing any apparent disease of this viscus. This has been proved on the dissection of many persons who have died of Apoplexy, &c.

I will here mention one of the most unpleasant complaints, and one of very frequent occurrence, which arises from a disordered state of the Digestive Organs—it is Head-ache. Let us only for a moment look around, and see how many are affected with this troublesome complaint, and we will be struck with surprise at the ravages it is making, and the extent it has attained. Head-aches, from whatever cause they may arise, should never be ne-

glected, nor suffered to continue without some attempt being made to remove them. Various and numerous are the exciting means to which pains in the head owe their origin, but by far the most frequent is a disordered state of the stomach and bowells. This evidently manifests itself upon the least attention being paid to the subject.

Sick-head-aches, or bilious head-aches, are of more frequent occurrence than any others, and, but few persons indeed, are unacquainted with them. They are mostly caused by irritations in the stomach and bowells, by an improper and indigestible diet, and by an oppressed and overloaded stomach, &c. Here Nature endeavours to relieve herself by ejecting the contents of the stomach, which they repel by sedatives, &c. and endeavour to allay the pain by making applications to the head, instead of assisting her by an emetic, and opening medicines.

Owing to the expulsion of the contents of the stomach, even when it takes place spontaneously, the affections of the head are rendered less dangerous than they

would be if the exciting cause continued, and too great a determination of blood to the head kept up, as Inflammation and Apoplexy, with its terrible results, might follow. These Head-aches occurring very frequently, at length injure the brain and cerebral nerves, and it is believed that many affections of the head and eyes, arise from this cause. That Amaurosis very frequently does, is now beyond all doubt, as it is often cured by applying our remedies to the digestive organs. In proof of which we have the concurrent testimony of Schmucker, Richter and Scarpa, all of whom say, that it arises more frequently from irritations in the Gastric organs, than from any other cause.

"It will not be doubted," says Armstrong, "but that many affections of the brain and nerves of the head, which occasion almost permanent pain, are mistaken for, and pass off under the denomination of Rheumatism, for which extra warm covering is applied to the head, and hot stimulants taken inwardly, when a diametrically opposite plan of treatment ought to

be pursued, to diminish both heat and action. It is well known that where there is a long continued pain and vexation in a part, an inflammatory action will be more or less excited; - bleeding, therefore, and an antiphlogistic system, would be most likely to afford radical and permanent relief. This treatment, however, is seldom resorted to until pain is no longer supportable, the worst symptoms have arisen, and the disorder rendered nearly if not altogether incurable."

There are other Head-aches, called Nervous, to remove which Cephalic Snuff, volatile stimulants, &c. are used. These might be serviceable, perhaps, supposing the cause to be in the head. They are sometimes intermittent, at others continued, and there can be very little doubt but that they arise, in general, from debility and inegularities of the stomach and abdominal viscera, causing indigestion and habitual costiveness, as those persons who are affected with them, have, in general, debilitated constitutions,

and are of irritable habits of body; therefore we should apply our remedies to the Digestive Organs, and pay the strictest attention to diet, without which we should frequently fail. Very often an alterative course of Mercury, after the evacuation of the stomach and bowells, is attended with the happiest effects. The best mode of doing which is to give a few grains of the Blue Pill at night and work it off in the morning by castor oil, or some other mild laxative.

It appears from Mr. Abernethy's valuable works, that the consent between the Digestive Organs and the Lungs, is very great, and that many Pulmonary complaints arise from or are aggravated by these disorders, to prove which he mentions a case which it may not be improper to cite:—"A servant of mine," he says, "told me that his wife was dying of consumption, which had been rapidly increasing for six months and had baffled all attempts to relieve it. Thinking that I could procure her some medical assistance from the Hospital, I went to see her. The case, however, seemed past

hope. She was extremely emaciated; her pulse beat 140 in a minute; her face was flushed; she had a most distressing cough; and spit up more than a pint of mucus, mixed with pus, and streaked with blood, in twenty-four hours. The circumstance, however, which most distressed her, was a continued purging of black and offensive matter. She told me that her bowells were first disordered;—that an unhealthy state of these organs had preceded the pulmonary affection, and was, indeed, habitual. I thought it unnecessary to trouble my medical friends in a case so hopeless, and ordered some pills containing one grain of Opium, to be taken in such quantity as was necessary to stop the purging. As she informed me that the disorder began in the bowells, I added to each pill half a grain of Calomel. By these means the purging was so much checked, that she did not find it necessary to take more than two pills in twenty-four hours; and when she had taken twelve, the

Mercury very unexpectedly affected her mouth. From that period the stools became of a natural colour and consistence; the cough and expectoration ceased; and she was soon sufficiently recovered to go into the country, from whence she returned apparently in good health."

Wilson Philip also notices this connection which exists between these Organs and the Lungs—and the Pulmonary complaints arising from the former, he calls Dyspeptic Phthisis. He says, "In by far the majority of cases in which both the Lungs and Digestive Organs are affected, the affection of the Digestive Organs precedes that of the Lungs. In some instances we find the affection of the Lungs the primary disease; but in these the case does not assume the form above described, but that of simple Phthisis; and the hepatic affection, which is always the most prominent feature of the derangement in the Digestive Organs, when it is complicated with Phthisis, does not show itself 'till a late period of the disease;

and then seems only to influence the symptoms by increasing the oppession and iritation, and hastening the fatal termination.

"We often observe the first of these forms of the disease arise from causes evidently acting on the Digestive Organs, and, as far as we can perceive, in no degree on the Lungs; and the last from causes evidently acting on the Lungs, and in no degree on the Digestive Organs.

"It seems to be a necessary inference from the preceding facts, that a diseased state of either set of organs may produce that of the other. But the tendency of disease to spread from the Digestive Organs to the Lungs is much greater than that to spread from the latter to the former. We often see a slight degree of derangement in the Digestive Organs, produce cough and other pulmonary symptoms; and derangement seldom exists in all the Digestive Organs without producing more or less of these symptoms; whereas, it

is only after disease has advanced very far in the Lungs, that it is apt to spread to the Digestive Organs; and, in the greater number of instances, it proves fatal without spreading to them."

When we trace the origin of many local diseases, we very frequently find that they have been preceded by, or are accompanied with a disordered state of the Digestive Organs. The writings of the ancients furnish us with many instances in which local diseases have arisen from affections of these organs. Richter, a German Professor, attributes very many local diseases to gastric origin, with whom Scarpa coincides, and, indeed, similar cases occur daily among ourselves.

While attending the Hospital practice, I saw a patient with a disease of the skin, denominated Exema Rubra, which was unsuccessfully treated by Diaphoretics, and local applications, for several months. He was afterwards sent to the Philadelphia Alms House. Dr Gibson, (who was then Surgeon of the House,) considered it as having its origin in the Digestive Organs, and directed his remedies accordingly, which, in

a very short time, nearly effected a cure. The patient being very anxious to leave the House, he was discharged before he was quite well.

Until lately, the English Physicians paid very little attention to gastric diseases, and were not very intimately acquainted with the subject. Mr. Abernethy awakened them from their lethargy, and turned their attention to this important object, and his example has been followed by many others.

"That cutaneous diseases," says Mr. Abernethy, "are much connected with the state of the Stomach, is generally known. Hence various medicines have been recommended to correct disorders of that viscus, with the view of removing the more evident, but consequent disease of the skin." He then relates the case of a patient in St. Bartholomew's Hospital, who had an herpetic disease of the skin, which had healed in the middle, and spread in circumference to such a degree that it nearly occupied the whole of the leg. There was an ulceration in the circumference which threw out firm fungus, of a tawny colour, and about half an inch in breadth. This fungus was

separated from the surrounding skin, (which was inflamed, but had not yet ulcerated) by a small groove or channel. There was a similar disease on the back part of the arm, which exactly resembled that on the leg. They had existed for two years, and refused to heal under every mode of treatment. He had been salivated without any good effect. Mr. Abernethy perceived that the digestive organs were impaired, and upon correcting them, the skin surrounding the disease became pale, and it ceased to spread. The fungus not healing, it was dressed with a weak solution of kali arsenicatum, and, in less than two months the patient was discharged entirely cured.

This can be easily accounted for, when we consider how great that sympathy is which exists between these organs and the skin. "Be it constantly recollected," says Dr. Armstrong, "not only that the skin is a fine expansion of nerves and blood-vessels, minutely interwoven with the cellular tissue, but that between that sensitive part and the vital organs within, there is a strong reciprocal consent, and, in fact, what is the ultimate structure of these organs, but

a seeming modification of the skin itself, a continuity of the same fine and sympathetic fabric of nerves, vessels, and cellular membrane?"

In the affections of the Digestive Organs, the skin is very irritable, and local applications, when ill-timed, do a great deal of harm, whilst under other circumstances, counter-irritations are successfully employed.

Wilson Philip mentions several cases similar to this, which, if not caused, were kept up and aggravated by a disordered state of the Digestive Organs. The first was that of a gentleman who labored under severe pains of the legs, which had been treated unsuccessfully for two years. The second, that of a gentleman who had sores continually breaking out in various parts of the body, which had proved very obstinate. The third was a lady, in whom glandular swellings appeared in different parts of the body, and it was feared that what is called a general breaking up of the constitution, was about to take place. Upon turning his

attention to the Digestive Organs, he found them de=
ranged; and on applying his remedies to them, they all
recovered.

Mr. Abernethy relates a very interesting case of Tetanus,
which was cured by removing a disordered state of these
organs; and, as it may ultimately lead to some good,
and, the disease being one of the most formidable we have
to contend with, I will give it in his own words:-"All
the experience which I have had relative to the treat=
ment of Tetanus, since the first publication of these
observations, has convinced me that more benefit is
obtained by correcting the errors of the Digestive Or=
gans, than by any other means. It may probably be
usefull to insert one case as a striking proof of this
fact:- A man who had been wounded in the foot,
but not badly, was brought about ten days after the
accident, to the admission room of the Hospital, and,
so violent and general were the spasms, that it was
scarcely expected that he could be taken to his bed alive.
The jaw was fast clenched, and the muscles of the back

and belly rigid. Convulsive actions came on frequently, and then all his limbs were violently affected. His bowells had not been relieved for many days. A grain of Calomel, and ten of Jalap, mixed with treacle, was given every fourth hour. It seemed also necessary to give him Opium, to mitigate his spasms, but it was mixed with an equal quantity of Calomel. When, after twenty-four hours, his bowells were purged; the discharges were not like fæces, and so extremely offensive that the patients could not stay in the wards. From this time, however, there was so complete a subsidence of the spasms, that no more Opium was necessary; and the patient recovered seemingly in proportion as the Digestive Organs recovered their healthy functions."

I might extend these views to far greater length, but it is my intention only to make a concise compilation of facts, to prove, (if any proof is requisite) the utility of attending to the Digestive Organs, in the treatment of diseases, in consequence of that intimate sympathy which exists between these organs and the systemat

large.

By way of conclusion, I will say a few words on Diet, being perfectly convinced that inattention to it is the most frequent cause of this disordered state of the Digestive Organs, and being so intimately connected with the treatment of many of the affections which I have noticed, and, indeed, of almost every other, that I cannot pass it over in silence. I think there is as much, if not more advantage derived from paying strict attention to Diet, than from any of the articles of the Materia Medica; but as Diet and Medicines go hand-in-hand with each other, it is from their co-operation that we obtain the most signal advantage in the treatment of many complaints.

Mr. Abernethy has laid down the precise rules that should be observed in regard to diet, which every one may be acquainted with by perusing his truly valuable works. He says that persons of a delicate habit, who are predisposed to disorders or irregularities of the stomach and bowells, should endeavour to ascertain what quan-

tity of food their stomachs are capable of digesting, and that they should eat no more; that particular attention should be paid to quality as well as quantity; and that after a meal to rest about three hours, then take exercise, and if they are thirsty to drink, but that they should avoid diluents of every kind while at meals, or immediately after, as the gastric juice will not act so promptly or efficiently, as it otherwise would, and thereby impede digestion. By drinking at proper times, we will have no desire to drink at improper ones. He also says that persons accustomed to vinous liquors, should not take them during meals, as the temporary excitement which they produce, might induce them to take more food than their stomachs are capable of digesting.

"Those who hamper their appetites," says Dr. Armstrong, "or gorge themselves perpetually with rich food; and those who fast long, or take their food irregularly, are apt to suffer from disorder of the Digestive Organs.

"Too poor or too spare a diet often produces consequences not unlike to those of too full or too rich a diet. In too poor or too spare a diet, there is not sufficient to supply the waste of the various secretions: the wear and tear of the animal machine, - and thus the vital principle languishes with the movements to which it is connected; - whilst by too full or too rich a diet, the digestive functions are so much oppressed, that a sufficient quantity of nutriment cannot be prepared from the ingesta for the general support, and here too emaciation follows."

This oppression and consequent debility of the digestive functions, is more apt to be induced by variety of meats than by any other cause; as variety inclines us to overload our stomachs, by exciting an artificial appetite. Every man knows that enough consists not in filling the stomach, but in taking sufficient to maintain nature; and, therefore, they would do well to bear in mind the precept of Hippocrates, who says, "The quantity of meat sought

not to be appointed by weight, number or mea=
sure, but by sense, and ability of our stomachs."
Solon being at the Wise=mens' feast, said, "Sum=
mum, imo divinum bonum est nullo vesci ali=
mento; proximum vero et naturale quod a mi=
nimo."